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STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD

The poorest families and UNICEF: a common commitment against extreme poverty

1. UNICEF thinking about reaching the poorest continues. Two decisions of the Executive Board, in 1989 and 1991, had underlined the first steps of these reflections, and introduced a few years earlier by Father Joseph Wresinski, requested the Executive Director to share the lessons learned about this subject. The most important step undertaken in this direction was an evaluation requested of the International Movement ATD Fourth World.

2. Entitled "Reaching the Poorest," this evaluation of seven projects (Burkina Faso, Haiti, Guatemala, Thailand, Canada, Peru and Uganda), undertaken by the Movement or by members of the Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World attempted to identify the conditions which permit the full participation of the poorest in development projects. Begun in 1992 in cooperation with the UNICEF Evaluation and Research Office, and completed in 1994, this evaluation will be published this coming autumn.

3. In the conclusions of this investigation, three points stand out:

(a) Enabling the very poor to become partners requires knowing them. Their living conditions isolate them and often hide them. Meeting and getting to know them require time, all the more so, as they do not easily express what they really think. Only lasting relationships and trust can further dialogue;

(b) The very poor "survive" thanks to their own efforts. This raises the question of how small projects can be brought to the attention of UNICEF and "qualify" for its support;

(c) A poor community does not speak easily of its poorest members, who are difficult to integrate, especially when the opportunity of a larger development project appears. The tendency will be to exclude them, not purposely, but because their extreme poverty is a barrier to participation. Nevertheless, the study brings to light the efforts of the communities to counter this tendency. These efforts show that only the commitment of an entire community can ensure that the poorest people can take a lasting part in development.

* E/ICEF/1995/13/Rev.1.

4. The international Movement ATD Fourth World hopes that the publication of this study will be an opportunity for the Executive Board to re-explore this question and to examine possible ways to follow-up on it.

5. In the context of this thinking on how to reach the poorest, the late Mr. James Grant welcomed at UNICEF House, last 17 October 1994, on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, a delegation of persons from 45 countries, made up of parents living in extreme poverty and persons committed to helping them. Together with his colleagues, Mr. Grant wanted to underline his personal commitment, and that of UNICEF, to the struggle of the poorest families so that they will be recognized as full partners for the future of their children and the development of their communities. He said to the delegates, "This obscenity of the violence of poverty need not continue. But still it's up to you and people like you to take the lead, to push for action".

6. These fathers and mothers came to acknowledge UNICEF as being one of the first of the United Nations organizations to be seriously interested in the lives of the very poor, to question itself about whether its programmes could reach the very poor and to want to build with these parents a partnership to assure the well-being of their children. These fathers and mothers reminded participants of their strong desire to be heard and listened to, their will to be recognized as citizens. One delegate asked, "We wonder why those who want to help us don't ask us about our opinions. Can't we help parents to take better care of their children?".

7. Together, the delegates and UNICEF staff restated their refusal of the "silent" marginalization of the poorest nations and of the poorest people within nations to whom Mr. Grant refers in his last State of the World's Children report. This report requests the international community to tackle energetically the question of economic marginalization because no social progress can be sustainable and no human development can be possible as long as economic and social exclusion continue to be the main characteristic of our systems. Together, delegates and members of UNICEF underlined their common will that the concern for the poorest should remain at the heart of their commitments.

8. In Copenhagen, this past March, political leaders made commitments to eradicate extreme poverty as quickly as possible. In paragraph 9 of the Declaration, they affirmed:

> "We gather here to commit ourselves ... to enhancing social development throughout the world so that all men and women, especially those living in poverty, may exercise the rights, utilize the resources and share the responsibilities that enable them to lead satisfying lives ... to contribute to the well-being of their families, their communities and humankind."

9. This commitment is very important as it recognizes that extreme poverty prevents people from exercising their rights, from assuming their responsibilities, and from contributing their share to the advancement of society. The message which the delegates came to share with Mr. Grant on 17 October points in this same direction. The late Executive Director recalled this when he designated the delegates and everyone they represent as "the first actors in the struggle against poverty".

10. The commitments of Copenhagen again give a central place to the question of reaching the poorest by calling, repeatedly, for greater participation in social, economic and political life for all people. This obviously assumes that the conditions for this participation are better known and better taken into account. In this sense, UNICEF is well placed to be able to continue to act as a leader about this question.

11. In the conclusion of his meeting with the delegates last 17 October, Mr. Grant made a remark which, as we look back several months later, also applies to him. In speaking about Father Joseph Wresinski, the founder of the Movement ATD Fourth World, Mr. Grant said, "He is a man who will never die. He sent out ideas and motivated others to action... We owe it to people who have preceded us to make progress".